



# SODIUM SWAPS: UTILIZING PRODUCT SUBSTITUTION

As a school nutrition operator, you are probably familiar with the menu items that contribute the most sodium on a daily and weekly basis. A best practice to reduce the amount of sodium in a school nutrition program's menu is to use **product substitution**. It involves exchanging one menu item with another, generally within the same meal pattern component. Using product substitution to replace higher-sodium food products with lower-sodium versions can make a big difference in the weekly sodium total, even if the reductions are small. Understanding sodium nutrient label claims and identifying foods and condiments that are typically lower in sodium can help you utilize product substitution to the fullest extent possible.

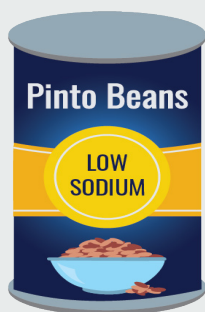
## SODIUM LABEL NUTRIENT CLAIMS

When searching for lower-sodium versions of food products, you may come across terms such as *Low Sodium* or *Sodium Free*. These terms are known as **nutrient claims**. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates the nutrient claims that food manufacturers can use to describe their products and put on food labels.

The FDA defines six (6) claims that may be used to indicate the amount of sodium in a food product. You can use these claims to quickly identify food products that **may** offer lower-sodium versions of the food products you currently use.

### FDA-APPROVED SODIUM LABEL CLAIMS

What It Says	What It Means
Sodium Free/Salt Free	Less than 5 mg of sodium per serving
Very Low Sodium	35 mg of sodium or less per serving
Low Sodium	140 mg of sodium or less per serving
Reduced Sodium	At least 25% less sodium than the regular product
Light in Sodium/Lightly Salted	At least 50% less sodium than the regular product
No Salt Added/Unsalted	No salt is added during processing – but these products may not be salt/sodium-free unless stated. The label must declare, "This is not a sodium-free food" on the information panel if the food is not "sodium free."



## FINDING THE LOWEST-SODIUM PRODUCT

Do not fully rely on a label claim to guarantee you have the lowest-sodium version of a product. For example, a *Reduced Sodium* product may not necessarily be *Low Sodium*. Recall that a product labeled *Reduced Sodium* has at least 25% less sodium than the regular product; a product labeled *Low Sodium* contains 140 mg of sodium or less per serving.

The following example illustrates the importance of reading the actual sodium amounts listed on Nutrition Facts labels.

A serving of the **Reduced Sodium black beans** (210 mg of sodium) has about 54% less sodium than a serving of **regular black beans** (460 mg sodium)! However, at 210 mg of sodium per serving, it is not considered a *Low Sodium* product.

### REGULAR SODIUM BLACK BEANS

Nutrition Facts	
3 servings per container	
<b>Serving size</b>	1/2 Cup (130g)
Amount Per Serving	
<b>Calories</b>	<b>100</b>
% Daily Value*	
<b>Total Fat</b> 0g	0%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 0mg	0%
<b>Sodium</b> 460mg	20%
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 20g	7%
Dietary Fiber 5g	18%
Total Sugars 0g	
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
<b>Protein</b> 7g	14%
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 40mg	4%
Iron 1.5mg	8%
Potassium 450mg	10%
*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.	

### REDUCED SODIUM BLACK BEANS

Nutrition Facts	
3 servings per container	
<b>Serving size</b>	1/2 Cup (130g)
Amount Per Serving	
<b>Calories</b>	<b>110</b>
% Daily Value*	
<b>Total Fat</b> 0g	0%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 0mg	0%
<b>Sodium</b> 210mg	9%
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 20g	7%
Dietary Fiber 5g	18%
Total Sugars 0g	
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
<b>Protein</b> 7g	14%
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 40mg	4%
Iron 1.6mg	8%
Potassium 470mg	10%
*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.	

A serving of **Low Sodium black beans** (130 mg of sodium) has significantly less sodium than a serving of **Reduced Sodium black beans** (210 mg of sodium).

### LOW SODIUM BLACK BEANS

Nutrition Facts	
3 servings per container	
<b>Serving size</b>	1/2 Cup (130g)
Amount Per Serving	
<b>Calories</b>	<b>110</b>
% Daily Value*	
<b>Total Fat</b> 0g	0%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Trans Fat 0g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 0mg	0%
<b>Sodium</b> 130mg	6%
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 20g	7%
Dietary Fiber 5g	18%
Total Sugars 0g	
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0%
<b>Protein</b> 7g	14%
Vitamin D 0mcg	0%
Calcium 80mg	6%
Iron 1.6mg	8%
Potassium 480mg	10%
*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.	

The nutrient content found on these Nutrition Facts labels for regular, Reduced Sodium, and Low Sodium black beans are for educational purposes only. The nutrient content of canned black beans varies by manufacturer formulation and brand.



## TAKE ACTION TO COMPARE!

Compare Nutrition Facts labels of similar products among the same brand and between different brands to find the lowest-sodium version. Keep in mind that the sodium level of a food product that fits the menu of one school district may not fit the menu of another school district, based on overall menu offerings and student preferences.

## CHOOSING LOWER-SODIUM FOODS AND CONDIMENTS

The following table lists food products and condiments that are typically lower in sodium. Incorporating more of these foods in your menu, as well as scratch or speed-scratch food preparation, will help you reduce your weekly sodium totals.

LOWER-SODIUM FOODS BY MEAL PATTERN COMPONENT	
Fruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most fresh, frozen, and canned fruit is naturally sodium-free or very low in sodium.</li> </ul>
Vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fresh or frozen vegetables are naturally low in sodium. Use lower-sodium condiments to add a boost of flavor. The <a href="#">Culinary Institute of Child Nutrition</a> (CICN) offers many flavor enhancement ideas.</li> <li>Only choose canned vegetables labeled <i>Low Sodium</i> or <i>No Salt Added</i>.</li> <li>Avoid prepackaged vegetable dishes with sauce.</li> </ul>
Grains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whole grains (e.g., brown rice, barley, quinoa) and pasta are naturally lower in sodium than more processed grain products, such as bread, rolls, bagels, and tortillas.</li> </ul>
Meats/Meat Alternates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fresh meat is the lowest-sodium variety of meat; avoid meat injected with or packaged in a saline or sodium solution. Check out ICN's <a href="#">Food Safety Resources</a> for meat storage and preparation tips.</li> <li>Boiled eggs are low in sodium if no salt is added.</li> <li>Choose canned beans labeled <i>Low Sodium</i> or <i>No Salt Added</i>.</li> <li>Use “unbreaded” meat products – they are lower in sodium than “breaded” options.</li> <li>Select lower-sodium varieties of cheese. Swiss, Monterey Jack, cheddar, and mozzarella cheeses are lower in sodium than processed cheeses, like American.</li> </ul>
Milk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plain, white milk is lower in sodium than flavored milk (e.g., chocolate).</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">Lower-Sodium Condiments</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Use herbs, spices, seasonings, and condiments to enhance the flavors of lower sodium foods.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To season or flavor food, use: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fresh or dried herbs and spices or salt-free seasoning mixes</li> <li>Chopped aromatic vegetables (e.g., garlic, ginger, carrots, celery, onions, peppers)</li> <li>Lemon or lime juice</li> </ul> </li> <li>On the salad bar line, offer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fresh salsa</li> <li>Flavored vinegars</li> <li>Simple salad dressings (e.g., vinegar and oil)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <div style="border: 1px solid green; padding: 10px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>The <a href="#">CICN</a> provides a number of resources and trainings regarding flavor enhancement – check out the trainings on made from scratch salad dressings and condiments, fresh herbs, and spice blends.</p> </div>	



The [Child Nutrition Recipe Box](#) (CNRB) provides many delicious, standardized recipes that are lower-sodium alternatives to prepackaged items. Many of the recipes feature the use of herbs, spices, and other low-sodium seasonings.



The [Culinary Institute of Child Nutrition](#) (CICN) provides trainings and resources to increase the culinary skills of school nutrition operators in support of preparing and serving kid-approved healthy school meals.

## PRACTICING PRODUCT SUBSTITUTION

**This popular lunch menu offers many opportunities in which product substitution and other sodium-reduction practices can be utilized to lower the total amount of sodium.**

LUNCH MENU		PRODUCT SUBSTITUTION AND OTHER SODIUM-REDUCTION PRACTICES	
Spaghetti with Tomato Sauce		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look for a lower-sodium tomato sauce; add flavor with oregano, basil, and garlic.</li> <li>• Consider making your own sauce in house.</li> </ul>	
Garlic Bread		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look for lower-sodium versions of garlic bread.</li> <li>• Consider making your own garlic bread (choose a lower-sodium bread; make garlic spread with your own recipe).</li> </ul>	
Turkey and Cheese Sandwich		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look for lower-sodium versions of turkey, cheese, bread, and condiments.</li> <li>• Offer two versions of the sandwich – one with cheese, one without.</li> <li>• Limit the size and number of condiment packets offered.</li> </ul>	
Tossed Salad		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look for lower-sodium salad dressings.</li> <li>• Make your own vinegar and oil dressings.</li> <li>• Find lower-sodium alternatives to salad toppings (e.g., croutons, bacon bits).</li> </ul>	
Mixed Veggies		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider using fresh or frozen vegetables instead of canned, even if low-sodium; flavor with herbs, spices, or salt-free flavoring mixes.</li> <li>• Incorporate a “Flavor Station” in your cafeteria where students can add herbs and spices to season foods to their liking.</li> </ul>	
Fruit Cocktail		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide more fresh, frozen, or canned fruit, which is naturally low in sodium.</li> </ul>	
Milk		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider offering flavored milk less often or not at all.</li> <li>• Place plain, white milk front and center to make it the easiest option for students to select.</li> </ul>	

**Now it is your turn!** Select one of your own weekly menus and explore how you can use product substitution to lower its overall sodium content. Start with small, manageable changes you can begin working on today, such as looking for lower-sodium versions of existing high-sodium menu items. Also, consider larger changes that you can work on throughout the school year, such as identifying heat-and-serve and convenience food menu offerings that could be made with a recipe.

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This project was funded using U.S. Department of Agriculture grant funds. The USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

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**Suggested Reference Citation:**

Institute of Child Nutrition. (2021). *Shaking it up! Small changes lead to big flavors. Sodium swaps: Utilizing product substitution*. University, MS: Author.

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